

## **Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**

The Residential Ratepayers Advisory Board (“the Board”) held a meeting on June 7, 2004 in the Public Utilities Commission (“PUC”) room 234. The meeting started at 2:04 p.m.

Present for the Board were:

Ed Brueggemann, Chair  
Larry Kelly, Co-Chair  
Jeff MacGillivray  
Otis Perry  
Richard Stonner  
Claira Monier

Present for the Office of Consumer Advocate (“OCA”) were:

Anne Ross, Consumer Advocate  
Kenneth Traum, Assistant Consumer Advocate  
Susan Weiss Alexant, Staff Attorney  
Christina Martin, Legal Assistant

The minutes from the May 3, 2004 Board Meeting were approved.

### **Agenda:**

#### **CashPoint**

Anne addressed the board with a brief overview of what CashPoint is and why it is on our agenda. Anne started with the fact that the OCA found out that CashPoint filed bankruptcy and that moneys paid by consumers to CashPoint for their utility bills have not reached the utility. The OCA filed a Petition with the Commission asking the Commission for “expedited declaratory relief concerning the treatment of funds paid to CashPoint Network Services, Inc. (CashPoint) by ratepayers, in payment of New Hampshire regulated utilities’ bills.” The PUC responded quickly. The utilities all then claimed they would honor payments from consumers, even if lost by CashPoint, so long as there was evidence that the customer had made the payment. A Press Release was sent out by the PUC warning consumers of the problems with CashPoint. Claira asked if the Press Release gave the OCA any credit for their work on this issue. Anne stated it did not. Claira said she did not see the press release. Dick, however did see it in The Union Leader. Claira suggested, and the board concurred, that the OCA should send something to the legislature regarding the work they did on this situation. Anne suggested initiating a rulemaking proceeding to address third party payment terminals.

Jeff suggested there be legislation that would require the agencies to be bonded.

Jeff asked if the consumer uses bank debit cards is the bank responsible?

Anne mentioned that the implied agency argument that was raised in the OCA’s Petition was opposed by every utility that responded.

Jeff suggested the OCA look into the Uniform Commerce Code for utilities and prepaid bills. Anne accepted the suggestion.

Ken asked Larry if allowing CashPoint type operations is worth the risk for the convenience particularly of low income customers. Larry feels it is.

Claire suggested we survey consumers on how this would affect them.

Dick mentioned that if the stores had to bond these agencies it may not be worth it for them to keep that service which in turn would seriously affect the consumer's payment options.

Ed asked that CashPoint be on the agenda for the next meeting to talk about the progress. The board agreed.

#### Line Items on Telephone Bills

Anne gave a brief overview of the subject and OCA's concerns with confusing and inflated line item charges. Anne also informed the board that Bill will address this in our next newsletter.

The Board then reviewed the addendum.

#### **Addendum:**

##### DE 03-200 PSNH Rate Case

Jeff asked Ken to elaborate on the gap between the increase PSNH is asking for, and the Staff's and OCA's decreases. Ken did so to the Board's satisfaction. Ed asked if this is a full rate case for PSNH. Ken and Anne explained yes. Ken explained the request of PSNH to have its charitable contributions paid for by customers. The Board opposed that concept preferring customers retain choice on contributions.

##### DE 03-113 PSNH Quality of Service

Regarding the "Right to Know" case, Jeff asked what issues is the OCA having with respect to either side of this case. Anne explained that although she believes the PUC should have revealed the locations on the E-1 reports, she doesn't feel it is appropriate to reveal names or mailing addresses.

The board believes that if nothing else comes out of this docket hopefully it will make PSNH more responsive to quality of service complaints.

Jeff suggested that PSNH needs to look at patterns in complaints and service.

Otis asked if there were any efforts to compare Bedford and other areas of the state for quality of service.

Anne explained that information from PSNH suggested that other areas are comparable and that Bedford may even have been less except for the years 1999-2000.

Dick mentioned PSNH is getting better with its quality of service.

Anne mentioned that a concern is that Bedford is a high growth, high usage area.

Jeff asked that someone look into the appliance standard companies have regarding the voltage fluctuation. Anne accepted that suggestion.

DW 03-155 Ashland

Ken noted in response to a question from Jeff that Stranded Costs were included in the price Ashland paid to NH Electric Cooperative.

DT 02-110 Verizon Cost of Capital

Otis asked why the OCA was denied intervenor status.

Anne explained that Article III courts are more strict with intervenor status and that the Court stated the PUC could adequately support the needs of the consumers in this case, which would mean that the OCA's concerns would be represented by the PUC. Jeff suggested that Anne mention to Jeb Bradley the legal reasons for the denial. Anne noted that the OCA may file an amicus brief.

Anne mentioned to the board that Susan Geiger has given her notice and is leaving the Commission as of July 9, 2004. Anne also mentioned that the Commissioners are trying to get the order for DT 02-165 out before she leaves.

DT 03-237 Granite State Telephone Depreciation Study

Jeff asked how the depreciation study was going. Anne responded that the credit goes to Bill; he has done a wonderful job of breaking things apart and analyzing the depreciation study.

Jeff commented that we should expect to see the depreciation lengths of time get shorter because of new technology.

DW 04-020 Fryeburg Water Company

Anne discussed the case a bit starting with the quality of water being poor. The OCA is hoping to develop a settlement between the parties. There is a question as to whether DES was ever told of the ongoing water problems.

DG 03-160 KeySpan Cost of Gas

Jeff asked if a customer gets notice before the bill that the price will be changing. Ken replied no. Jeff suggested that it be a requirement to pre-notify the consumer prior to the rate change, so a consumer may adjust their usage if they can. A brief discussion followed on supply and demand of natural gas.

Next meeting is scheduled for July 12, 2004.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00.